

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7027

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: MARR, MILL, KS, KN

SUBJ: ROK PLAYS UP TUNNEL DISCOVERY

REF SEOUL 7622

1. EXPLORATION OF NORTH KOREAN TUNNEL DISCOVERED IN DMZ (REFTEL) CONTINUED NOV 17 AND 18. BY EVENING NOV 18 ROK HAD EXPLORED 630 METERS OF TUNNEL BEFORE FINDING SEVERAL STACKS OF DYNAMITE AND TEMPORARILY HALTING EFFORTS. THE TUNNEL RUNS NE-SW WITH THE SOUTHERN END APPROXIMATELY 1400 METERS FROM THE MDL. THE INVESTIGATION INDICATES THAT CONSTRUCTION STILL IN PROGRESS WHEN DISCOVERED.

2. SO FAR EXPLORATION HAS UNCOVERED THREE RAIL TURN TABLES FOR HAND RAIL CARS USED IN TUNNEL, ONE SMALL ROOM OFF TUNNEL, AND MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS OF CONSTRUCTION AND PERSONAL EQUIPMENT.

3. UNC HAS PROPOSED TO HOLD MAC MEETING NOV 19 TO CHARGE NORTH WITH VIOLATION ARMISTICE, BUT KPA/CPV HAS NOT YET RESPONDED.

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4. ROKG HAS USED TUNNEL DISCOVERY TO EMBARK ON MAJOR PROPAGANDA EFFORT AGAINST NORTH. MEDIA HAS GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO STATEMENT TO PRESS BY DEFENSE MINISTER SUH THAT PURPOSE OF TUNNEL IS TO MOVE TROOPS FOR SURPRISE ATTACK AND NOT FOR INFILTRATION SMALL NUMBERS ESPIONAGE AGENTS OR GUERRILLAS. SUH LINKED TUNNEL WITH OTHER NORTH KOREAN EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE ROK SUCH AS "CONSPIRACY" NATIONAL FEDERATION DEMOCRATIC YOUTH AND STUDENTS, (NFDYS), AND AUG 15 ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON PRESIDENT PARK. SUH SAID THAT ROKG HAS INFORMATION OF OTHER TUNNELS BEING CONSTRUCTED IN DMZ AND WILL TAKE "APPROPRIATE ACTION IN DUE TIME."

5. PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESMAN QUOTED BY PRESS AS SAYING THAT PRESIDENT PARK AND KEY CABINET MINISTERS AGREED NOV 17 THAT TUNNEL WOULD ENABLE ENTIRE REGIMENT WITH EQUIPMENT TO SLIP INTO SOUTHERN PORTION DMZ AT ONE TIME.

6. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAS ALSO GOTTEN INTO ACT. IT WILL HOLD PLENARY SESSION NOV 19 TO QUESTION GOVT ON TUNNEL AND TO ADOPT RESOLUTION CENSURING NORTH KOREA WHICH WILL BE SENT TO UNGA. NDP IS MEETING EVENING NOV 18 TO DECIDE IF IT WILL PARTICIPATE IN SESSION IN SPITE OF ASSEMBLY BOYCOTT.

7. FOREIGN MINISTRY CALLED IN DIPLOMATIC CORPS NOV 18 FOR BRIEFING ON TUNNEL DISCOVERY BY VICE FOREIGN MINISTER LHO SIN-YONG. BRIEFING, WHICH UTILIZED CHARTS AND MAPS AS WELL AS SHORT FILM, MADE ESSENTIALLY SAME POINTS AS THOSE MADE BY SUH. EMPHASIS WAS ON CONTINUING MILITARY THREAT FROM NORTH AS EVIDENCED BY "PERMANENT FACILITIES" TO BE USED TO LAUNCH "LARGE-SCALE SURPRISE ATTACK AGAINST ROK" AT DECISIVE MOMENT. LHO ESTIMATED THAT TUNNEL COULD HANDLE 5-6,000 SOLDIERS IN ONE HOUR AND SPECULATED THAT WITH 5-7 TUNNELS WHICH MAY EXIST IN DMZ ATTACK BY 30-40,000 TROOPS POSSIBLE.

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8. COMMENT: ROKG IS PREDICTABLEY EXPLOITING TUNNEL DISCOVERY FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION. OUR INITIAL IMPRESSION IS THAT VICE MINISTER LHO'S FIGURES EXAGGERATE THE POTENTIAL THREAT REPRESENTED BY TUNNEL. WE ARE CURRENTLY REVIEWING THIS QUESTION. SNEIDER

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